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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 004268

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: IRAQI POLITICIANS SPINNING REFERENDUM RESULTS

Classified By: Political Counselor Robert S. Ford for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

1. (C) SUMMARY: Iraqi politicians were quick to begin spinning results of the October 15 referendum, issuing statements to the media on provincial voting well before the Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq (IECI) began its tally of governorate ballot sheets. While such spinning is to be expected after a major vote, in the current Iraqi context, pre-tally assertions about the outcome threaten to undermine the credibility of the ultimate referendum result. This is of particular concern in Ninewa, as Kurdish, Shia and Sunni Arab leaders have made strident and dramatically different pronouncements about the percentages of "yes" and "no" votes in this potentially decisive swing province. Such pre-tally rhetoric could lay the groundwork for future assertions that the referendum results were cooked. We are urging the political parties to stop talking about the outcome in the media and to let the IECI finish the count first. We are urging the IECI to reiterate its commitment to the integrity of the process. END SUMMARY.

SPINNING TAKES OFF

2. (C) With the fate of the draft constitution likely hanging on results in Ninewa and Salah ad-Din provinces, Shia, Kurdish and Sunni Arab politicians began to declare results October 15, even though the IECI did not begin to tally ballot sheets until 1000 hrs, October 17. Ammar al-Hakim (son of SCIRI leader Abd' al-Aziz) was quoted on al-Sharqia television October 16 as saying that 70 percent of Ninewa had voted yes. Ninewa Deputy Governor Khasro Goran said on al-Arabiya television October 16 that 60 percent of the provincial vote had been in support of the constitution.

3. (C) For their part, Sunni Arab leaders appear to be waging a preemptive media campaign against a possible positive referendum result, assailing its credibility even as the vote count proceeds. National Dialogue Council Spokesman Sa'adun Zubaidi claimed in an October 16 al-Hurra broadcast that the referendum process was illegitimate because copies of the constitution were not distributed early enough to the Iraqi people for them to have a chance to absorb them. A spokesman for a group calling itself the "Mosul Independents" asserted in an October 16 al-Sharqiyya TV interview that all of Ninewa had voted against the constitution and that any results indicating otherwise were clearly forged.

4. (C) Meanwhile, Sunni Arab politician Saleh Mutlak appeared on al-Jazeera and al-Arabia October 16 to predict -- and to "warn" the USG -- about potential civil disobedience by Sunni Arabs if a "yes" vote "proved" there was referendum fraud in Ninewa. After Mutlak's statements, PolCouns called him to urge him to avoid inflammatory rhetoric and bring any evidence he has of fraud to the attention of the IECI. Mutlak conceded he had no evidence. However, he noted that the National Dialogue Council has observers in Ninewa who report that the provincial vote in the referendum had gone 80 percent against the constitution. Mutlak added that the disparity between these reports and Shia and Kurdish claims that the vote had gone heavily the other way suggested the danger of fraud.

5. (C) Separately, Poloff received four calls in the space of two hours the evening of October 16, from Zuhair Humadi, senior aide to VP Abd' al-Mahdi (SCIRI), concerning Ninewa results. In his initial call, Zuhair assured poloff that northern Ninewa and Mosul had voted overwhelmingly in support of the constitution. Poloff replied that he could not comment as we were getting conflicting, preliminary reports. Zuhair called back shortly thereafter to say that votes cast in the province had been only 600,000 (preliminary IECI estimates are that Ninewa participation was around 800,000). In his third call Zuhair reported that he had heard from a reliable

source that ballot counting had yet to begin for either Mosul or Tikrit. Another SCIRI source contacted another Poloff making similar assertions. Embassy poloffs in both instances urged that Iraqi political figures avoid stating numerical results and to let the IECI make the official pronouncements.

NEED FOR IECI CLARITY

16. (C) In separate October 16 conversations with poloffs, UN/EAD chief Carina Perelli and IECI Commissioner Farid Ayar verified that the Commission intended to release preliminary referendum results on or about October 17, with uncertified final figures around October 19. Perelli acknowledged that the IECI needs to be out front in publicly replying to partisan spinning of the Ninewa results, such as Mutlak's implication about fraud in Ninewa. She agreed to push Commissioner Farid Ayar to make a strong statement affirming commitment to a fair count, including in Sunni Arab majority areas. Poloff also asked that UN EAD staff verify the secure status of ballot documents throughout the country in IECI-controlled warehouses. He asked that particular attention be paid to security in areas where the outcome may be close and local militias are strong. (COMMENT: Perelli is currently scheduled to leave Iraq on or about October 20. In light of the potentially serious controversy over the referendum outcome, her departure before the final results are announced would be especially problematic. END COMMENT)

PRESS REPORTS QUESTIONED

17. (C) Meanwhile press reports appeared October 16 quoting IECI provincial staff commentary on governorate outcomes. Samira Mohammed Al Nea'mi, an IECI information department employee in Mosul, was quoted by the Associated Press October 16 as having reported that 300,000 Ninewa voters had supported the constitution and 80,000 had opposed. REO Mosul contacted Al Nea'mi late October 16, and she denied ever having provided this information.

18. (C) In an October 16 conversation with UN elections officer David Avery, poloff raised a similar report from Salah ad-Deen, quoting a provincial IECI source as saying voters in the province had overwhelmingly voted 'no'. Poloff noted that such pre-tally media reports could undermine public confidence in the credibility of the referendum process. Avery agreed, and told poloff that IECI Baghdad has previously instructed each GEO to conduct a review of the 'Counting Form 98' and pass only the 'yes' and 'no' totals back to the IECI. Avery explained that the IECI intended to use this data as a preliminary count only so as to be available for release given expected high demand for numbers. Although each GEO is prohibited from making these figures public, Avery said that political entity monitors present at counts may in some cases have leaked information. Avery said that information in the press about returns should at this stage be disregarded.

COMMENT

19. (C) Some spinning is to be expected, but these pre-tally pronouncements by Iraqi political leaders threatens to spread into a campaign on either side questioning the results. We will keep urging the politicians to let the IECI make the announcements of official results and to use IECI mechanisms to question any tallies.
Khalilzad